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ABSTRACT

These discussion guides for the 1986 regional conferences focus on (1) early childhood education, and (2) increasing the number of students who complete high school. The early childhood material consists of an introductory comment about the expansion of preschools which includes a review of research literature concerning lasting effects of preschool education, the quality of schools and teaching, and reform movements and change in kindergarten through grade three. Suggested discussion questions on important problems and needed actions in early childhood education are then listed. The material on high school completion provides an introductory comment illustrating the need of some students for special help to stay in school, reasons students give for dropping out of school, information about factors increasing dropout rates, and steps schools should take to help students at risk of dropping out. Subsequent discussion focuses on appropriate interventions for students in grades pre-K through 3, 4 through 6, 7 through 8, and 9 through 12, including treatments for out-of-school youth between 16 and 21 years of age. Following this, five discussion questions about increasing high school completions on both the state and local levels are listed and conclude the document. (RH)

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WELCOME TO

1986

REGENTS/COMMISSIONER'S REGIONAL CONFERENCES

Education Success for All
Better Beginnings — Stronger Completions

DISCUSSION GUIDE

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Early Childhood Education
(Pre-K Through Grade 3
with Emphasis on Pre-K)

COMMENT

This is a time of great promise and great challenge for early childhood education, especially for expansion of pre-kindergarten. Our nation is now devoting much more energy and money to early childhood programs and has more knowledge about how children learn and grow. Our nation is recognizing explicitly the importance of parents in the education of their children and the need to integrate education with the provision of services to families. The need for early childhood programs is great.

Profound changes have taken place in family structures over the past 25 years. There has been a dramatic increase in the numbers of young children who have two working parents, who live in households with only one parent, or who are born to parents who are themselves still children. Forty percent of all identified poor persons in our nation are children, while children make up 27 percent of the total population.[1] Almost one-half of all Black children and one-third of all Hispanic children fall below the poverty line. Programs to serve children such as Head Start, however, serve less than 15 percent of children living in poverty, and census data indicate that children whose parents earn under $10,000 a year are less than half as likely to attend a pre-school program as are those whose parents earn more than $20,000 a year.

Review of the Research Literature

Three kinds of data are useful in considering early childhood programs: research related to the lasting effects of pre-school education; research related to the quality of schools and teaching; and research related to reform movements and change in kindergarten through grade three.

Research on the Lasting Effects of Early Childhood Education. Data supporting the contention that gains from early childhood education persist throughout a child's schooling have become available from a number of sources. Longitudinal studies reported by Irving Lazar[2] and David Weikart[3] conclude that adolescents who had attended pre-school programs were more likely to hold steady jobs and were less likely to have been retained at grade level, to have been placed in special classes, to quarrel with parents and bosses, or to be involved in teenage pregnancies and criminal proceedings than were their peers who had not attended such programs.

A five-year evaluation of the New York State Prekindergarten Program[4] reports similar findings. A follow-up to this evaluation shows that students from the initial cohort who were in eighth grade at the time of the follow-up had maintained gains and retained positive attitudes toward learning. The High Scope study[5] provides a cost-benefit analysis of early childhood programs and deserves mention. Based on 15 years of follow-up data, the study shows that for every dollar invested in early childhood programs, the taxpayer accrued almost $6.00 in benefits. These benefits include, among others, savings to the schools from lowered costs of subsequent education, increased lifetime earnings, and the value of mothers' released time.

Some researchers present different findings on the effectiveness of early childhood education. The McKey study[6] concludes that Head Start children showed significant immediate gains on cognitive and socio-emotional tests and in health status, but they did not maintain the cognitive gains. Nevertheless, the study did find that some children were less likely to be retained at grade level and to be placed in special classes, that Head Start families had been helped in linkages to services, and that social service and other agencies had become more attuned to the needs of families.

Research on the Quality of Teaching. The Miller and Bizzel study[7] of the effects of kindergarten education shows that while children who attended kindergartens where the curriculum stressed drill and skill practice scored impressively on initial tests, they did not for the most part retain these gains. On the other hand, children who attended programs that emphasized strengthening attitudes toward learning, fostering curiosity and creativity, and providing time for exploration and experimentation showed less impressive short-term gains but greater benefits over longer periods of time. The longitudinal analysis carried out by David Weikart, already mentioned, also determined that young people who exhibited the fewest long-term benefits from their pre-school experiences had all attended behavioristic or other highly structured programs which focused on drills, skills practice, and workbooks.

In a keynote address delivered at an April, 1986 Regents/State Education Department conference on early childhood learning, Lilian Katz, Professor of Education at the University of Illinois, forcefully advocated that the main purpose of education -- at every level -- is to strengthen the disposition of the learner to go on learning. In reaching this goal for early childhood programs,

Dr. Katz stresses the following points:

- There are four categories of learning: knowledge, skills, feelings, and dispositions. Dispositions are ways of responding to experience such as curiosity, humor, generosity, enthusiasm, etc. There is a distinction between a child having reading skills versus having a disposition to be a reader. We must help young learners to acquire the skills they do need and, at the same time, to strengthen their disposition to use these skills.

- We should exercise caution against the tendency to introduce academic skills too soon in early childhood programs. Since all children learn and progress in their own way, imposing a formal curriculum too soon may doom some children to early failure. In order to reach a common goal for all students, different approaches may be needed to build upon the learning style of each child.

- Learning is best for all children when they are engaged in project work (interactive activities) rather than in passive activities.

- In the development of their language skills, conversation is very important for children. Conversation must be relevant to the child's experience -- conversation among children or between the child and adult which is not reduced to a form of interrogation.

- We must cultivate within children the disposition of interest, defined as the ability to lose oneself outside of one's self and being able to engage in a sustained effort over time.

- An integral component of early childhood programs must be the development of social competencies for children. Research indicates that children who have not developed adequate social competence by the time they are six years old are at significant risk in adulthood.

- To implement these principles for successful early childhood programs, children through the age of seven should use time in school engaged in project work -- working together at projects in which they apply the skills to be learned. This approach not only creates an optimum environment for children but also an interesting and creative one for teachers which is key for the success of any early childhood program.

Howard Gardner[8] points out that schools have become overly concerned with two kinds of intelligence, the logical/mathematical and the linguistic. He identifies five others: physical, musical, spatial, intrapersonal, and interpersonal. He points out that, as we move from the prehistoric through the agricultural, industrial, technological, and informational ages, different

intelligences take on importance. In the informational age, Gardner maintains, more attention needs to be paid especially to the intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligences.

John Goodlad[9] provides important observational data and analysis of what happens to children who are made to follow overly prescriptive curricula which allow them no opportunity to make an investment in their own learning. Vincent Rogers[10] contends that our schools claim to educate broadly but, in practice, emphasize a narrow "three R's" curriculum taught to large groups of children in a relatively standardized way using textbooks, workbooks, ditto sheets, and teacher-dominated talk as the principal techniques.

A recently completed three-year study on how children learn to read[11] offers many insights to assist teachers to improve the quality of classroom instruction. It emphasizes the importance of personal meaning in all learning and warns of dangers of training teachers as technicians and children as machines. The study contends that bringing technological know-how to bear on difficult educational problems has often diminished the quality of the teaching/learning process by reducing learning tasks to manageable component parts but ignoring the learner's personal investment in his/her own learning.

Research on Strategies for Organizational Change. Goodlad's work, already mentioned, points to useful techniques for introducing educational reforms in early childhood with some cautions:

- Ideas for implementing change are not sufficient by themselves. Ideas developed, refined, and packaged away from their intended targets seldom produce any changes.[12] The agreement of the people who will be directly involved in the changes is crucial.
- Potentially powerful reforms can fail if they require teachers to transcend established conventions and regularities of the classroom.[13]

- Ongoing dialogue, decision-making, action, and evaluation must be accepted as a basic premise. Goodlad warns that this is difficult to generate and maintain.

- Support from the community is essential. Teachers and administrators cannot be expected to work on a difficult process without community support.

- Goals must be established for all students, not just those who are intellectually able or handicapped. Teachers must be actively involved in determining the curricula related to these goals.

- Students must be involved in their own learning and organizational arrangements must support this involvement, increasing the chances for mastery at each level of learning.

- Staff development should focus on self-renewal so that teachers see themselves as responsible for their own professional growth.

- Teacher education programs must provide teachers with a sound philosophy of teaching, rather than simply information about classroom management.

- Leadership by principals and administrators must support these processes.

Program Components and Implementation

The research cited underscores the value of certain components and implementation strategies for successful learning in early childhood programs.

Parent Education and Involvement. Early childhood studies show that children whose parents are involved in the program make academic and social gains and maintain them. Successful parent programs build on a true school/home partnership by acknowledging that:

- Parents are children's first teachers but this does not mean they best teach formal content. When parents teach children to respect themselves and others, to be curious and inventive, to value learning, to finish a task begun, to be honest and thoughtful, to think clearly, and to observe cause and effect, then the school is able to teach formal content by building on the foundation provided in the home.

- Preparation for parenthood begins in infancy. It is easiest to become a good parent if one has experienced good parenting. For those who have not experienced good parenting, help is required. We learn to be better parents as we grow with our children and learn more about each stage of their development.

Developmental Approach to Education. Sound early education programs are based on children's strengths and interests. Children are natural learners and natural practicers. The task is to find situations that lead them to discover the things children need to know and to assist them in this learning, either through direct teaching or by providing an environment in which they can learn cooperatively or independently.

Staff Development. Teachers must learn to observe, record, and plan for children based on the observational data gathered. Teachers need opportunities to develop these practices by working with their peers and exchanging perceptions. This deepens insights, sharpens skills, and increases and refines their knowledge about how they help children grow and learn.

Continuity. Uri Bronfenbrenner's recent research[14] points to the fact that many children growing up today lack continuity of relationships and experiences in their homes, communities, and schools. School personnel can demonstrate the importance of continuity in children's lives by providing it in school and enhancing it in home and community. Schools can provide opportunities for children's teachers (past, present, and prospective) to meet with other staff members, to work intensively with families on continuity between the home and school, and to cooperate with other agencies serving the family to assure continuity among services.

Child Care, Health and Social Services. Children cannot learn effectively unless physical and social needs are met. Many children live in circumstances of

abuse, neglect, poor housing, poor nutrition, domestic violence, and lack of any caring systems. Child care for the time children are out of school and unattended by parents and health and social services is essential for effective child development and education. Comprehensive health services must focus on physical, mental, dental, and nutritional health. They include immunizations, health screening, treatment, and preventive education and involve both physical and mental health concerns. Social services must address the myriad needs of sustenance, safety and shelter.

Evaluation. Evaluation in a good early childhood program consists of ongoing narrative descriptions of the program based on observations by a variety of people; collections of children's work; and interviews with parents, teachers, administrators, community members, and children themselves. Evaluations should be designed to emphasize continuing program monitoring with the opportunity for constructive modification of program components, if needed.

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10. Rogers, Vincent. "Exceedingly Effective Schools." Educational Leadership. Volume No. 7, April 1983.

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12. Sarason, Seymour. The Culture of the School and the Problem of Change. 2nd Edition. Allyn and Bacon. Boston. 1982.

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14. Bronfenbrenner, Uri. Research Report in Preparation.

Early Childhood Education

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The Regional Conferences are designed to bring out participants' views on the most important problems and most effective actions to be considered and taken at local and State levels. Of particular concern are: 1) The priority to be given to expanding voluntary pre-kindergarten program opportunities for four year old children; 2) The priority to be given to developmental approaches to educating students in pre-kindergarten through grade 3; and 3) The priority to be given to connecting early childhood programs with child care, health and social services.

Suggested questions for more detailed discussion of specific subtopics follows:

A. Parent Education and Involvement

B. Developmental Approach to Education

C. Child Care, Health and Social Services

D. Evaluation

A. Parent Education and Involvement

Parents are the first teachers. When children enter school, parents and teachers must have effective partnerships for school success.

1. How are parents encouraged and helped to teach their children?
2. How are parents helped to learn about the individual learning styles of their children?
3. How are parents helped to know the right balance between high expectation and pushing children beyond their capacity?
4. How are children with family problems helped without infringing on family rights?

B. Developmental Approach to Education

Sound early childhood education programs are based on children's strengths and interests with recognition of differential styles and rates of learning.

1. How do teachers help children become self-confident? self-disciplined?
2. How can teachers help children to learn more about their own strengths, interests and learning styles?
3. How should the availability of pre-kindergarten programs change existent K-3 programs?
4. What kinds of staff development programs are needed for early childhood teachers?

C. Child Care, Health and Social Services

Changed family structure and economic obligations have created new needs for integrated education, child care, health and social services.

1. What is the role of the school to assure that each child's health and social service needs are met?
2. How is assistance provided to parents without infringing on their rights and without making them feel incompetent?

3. What is the role of the school in connecting education to child care services?

4. How are the services of education, child care, health and social services best coordinated?

D. Evaluation

1. What use, if any, are achievement and diagnostic tests in the early years?

2. In what ways can learning experiences be assessed against a child's past performance rather than against a performance norm?

3. What ways are there of reporting child development to parents beyond test scores and standardized measures?

4. What are the best ways of evaluating early childhood program effectiveness?

E. Research and Teacher Preparation

1. What further research into the needs or the development of young children should universities conduct?

2. What changes, if any, are needed in teacher preparation programs to assure that early childhood educators learn to involve parents, build on the strengths and interests of young children through observation and planning, strengthen relationships among school and community, and evaluate effectiveness of their own work in teaching the young?

Increasing High School Completions

COMMENT

In 1900, only one in 10 teenage Americans graduated from high school. By 1978, nearly 7 out of 10 people over the age of 24 had completed at least four years of high school. Although we should be proud of this accomplishment, we must be committed to successful high school completions for all.

Three brief case descriptions serve to illustrate the complexity of the problem:

John, age 7, brings with him a number of situations that do not seem to be accommodated by his elementary school: poor language and mathematics skills; a cultural background different from his teachers; difficulty in listening to the teacher and focusing on academic tasks. He is often late and absent from school. The school has a traditional academic curriculum, no preschool program, and a guidance program with limited resources to accommodate any special student needs.

Theresa, age 13, is in foster care but does not get along with her foster family. She has been in several foster homes over the past five years. Her mother is at home with two small children, the start of a new family. Her older sister became pregnant and left school early to raise her baby on welfare. Theresa has no friends at school and talks rudely to teachers when she is asked to participate in academic exercises. As a result she often gets failing grades from not having participated. Her teachers say she is not trying.

Dennis, age 17, is enrolled as a sophomore at his inner city high school with an enrollment of 4,000 mostly minority, mostly poor students. Dennis attended classes for four weeks and then has been absent--from school and home--for most of the year. During his four weeks in school, Dennis did poorly on all tasks that required reading and was sent three times to the principal's office for tardiness. The school has a high percentage of uncertified and first-year teachers and no organized system of

inservice education for these inexperienced teachers. Dennis spends most of his time "hanging out" with friends who are also absent from school. Their most common complaints are that teachers don't care about them and the administration has an unfair discipline system. Dennis wants to find a job but employers tell him he must first have a diploma.

These children and countless others need special help.

In New York State, as in the nation, the dropout rate is a serious problem. New York State Education Department dropout statistics indicate that during the school year 1984-85, 49,391 students over age 16 dropped out[1] of school: 28,677 of these students in New York City. This dropout rate was 5.8 percent of high school enrollment statewide and 10.1 percent in New York City.[2]

Dropping out is not spread evenly among different groups of students. For example, if one is from a large or single-parent family and lives in a large city that increases the chances the student will drop out. Students of lower socio-economic status, students with limited English proficiency, students who are Black, and students who are Hispanic are more likely than others to drop out of school.

Current demographic projections indicate that the New York State population will have greater numbers of students with characteristics previously related to higher dropout rates. The size of our dropout population could grow significantly if more steps are not taken to promote high school completion.

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[1]A dropout is defined as any pupil who left school prior to graduation for any reason except death and did not enter another school or high school equivalency program.

[2]These percentages represent annual dropout rates which are calculated by dividing the number of dropouts by enrollment in grades 9-12. This is not the same as the commonly used four-year retention rate which compares the number of students enrolled in grade 9 in a given year with the number of high school graduates four years later. Annual dropout rates are reported rather than four-year retention rates, since the latter do not take into account student mobility.

The material which follows describes what needs to be done to reduce the probability of dropping out. These materials are divided into three sections: In the first section, reasons given by students for dropping out are highlighted. Information about the characteristics of students, schools, and school systems that increase the chances of dropping out are also provided. The second section has information about what steps a school should take in order to help the student at risk. The final section describes the appropriate treatments which might be provided at different levels of schooling.

This paper has been developed to stimulate discussion about increasing high school completions in New York State. The regional conferences will serve as a basis for a comprehensive and systematic review of the contents of this paper. The many recommendations, ideas and practices to increase high school completions which flow from these conferences will be used to strengthen the strategies and content of this paper.

SECTION I

Reasons for Dropping Out and Factors Related to Failure to Complete High School

This section has two parts. The first part presents information on why students drop out. The second part describes the research-based or experienced-based factors that seem to increase the probability a student will drop out.

Reasons for dropping out are diverse. They appear to differ according to sex, race and ethnicity of students.

The National Longitudinal Youth Cohort study estimated, for example, that for boys (who constitute 54 percent of dropouts), 51 percent drop out because of reasons related to the school, 21 percent for economic reasons, 5 percent for family reasons, and 22 percent for other reasons. For girls, 33 percent cited school-related reasons, 37 percent cited marriage or pregnancy, 9

percent cited economic reasons, and 21 percent cited other reasons. Youths older than the compulsory attendance age who have been retained in grade and then leave school form the largest part of the respondents cited.

Research results demonstrate that the act of dropping out generally has precedent signs. Most dropouts have faced a variety of problems, the negative effects of which accumulate through their school and personal lives.

Unless early interventions are available, problems start and grow over the school years. By the end of the primary grades negative effects are manifest not only in school failure, but also in negative attitudes toward school and negative student self image. The middle school years are a difficult period with great physical, intellectual, social, and emotional changes of early adolescence. By the time at-risk students reach high school the negative effects of their school experiences are multiple and deep rooted; these, coupled with the problems associated with their personal lives, lead students to drop out of school.

Many programs concerned with preventing dropouts begin too late even though the signs of a dropout-prone student may often be observed in the early school years. These programs are offered either after the student has dropped out of school or in the senior high school years. Innovative drop-out prevention programs are therefore increasingly provided in elementary schools. In contrast to preschool education, which has a strong research tradition, a wealth of experimental models, and some models that have been demonstrated to be effective, the secondary school level is relatively neglected in all these respects. There is an urgent need to determine the essential elements of effective dropout prevention programs at the secondary school level.

Knowing what works requires knowing what was done, to whom, and with what effect. Education agencies and schools are trying a myriad of approaches that deserve serious inquiry and careful

scrutiny. The education community needs to use the results of current practice to refine future practice. A systematic approach to these practices is required. Evaluating the differences in outcomes achieved by different types of programs, would result in considerable benefit. For example, do academic, vocational, or guidance approaches work best? Without addressing the outcomes question, it is clear that most districts are trying many things. Systematic research on these interventions is badly needed.

Research studies which have examined schools have indicated that a number of school-related factors are likely to contribute to students dropping out. Recent analyses of poorly performing schools in which there are large numbers of students who are at risk of dropping out also reveal these schools typically do not have the resources which are available to better performing schools.

The dropout problem involves difficulties that reach far beyond the schools, and major improvements will probably not come without contributions from other sectors of the society. Still, there is a great deal the schools can do to monitor the problem, to remedy educational practices that push students out, to foster innovative dropout prevention efforts, and to collaborate with community organizations and businesses that can provide a climate of encouragement and positive expectation for vulnerable students. The exchange of services between schools and community organizations and businesses can result in the economic development and a renewal of the entire community in the process.

Although high-quality services to identifiably high risk youth can improve retention for many of these students, ultimately the goal is to eradicate the need for dropout prevention programs by creating schools which are increasing their effectiveness with all students across the board.

What Factors Are Associated With Dropping Out. Research studies provide a comprehensive description of the socio-economic, cultural, educational, personal, and attitudinal

characteristics of students who drop out of school. Although causal relationships between these factors and drop out behavior have not been established, associations between these sets of factors and such behavior have been demonstrated.

Researchers generally agree on the characteristics which are associated with dropping out, they often differ on how best to organize them. For purposes of this report factors related to dropping out are clustered into three major categories: Student, School, and System factors. For example, a student's background, attitude, school achievement, situational factors such as drug, alcohol and child abuse, pregnancy and marriage are student attributes which increase the likelihood of a student leaving school early. Inadequate instruction, irrelevant curriculum that does not relate to the culture of the students in the school, and teachers who are not thoroughly prepared, are school related factors that adversely affect a school's retention of students. Lastly, dropout rates have been thought to be affected by inadequate facilities, high student-adult ratios, the inequitable allocation of resources for textbooks and supplies, and inadequate resources for curriculum and staff development. These are factors which, in large part, relate to the system at large.

To solve the problem of dropouts is not a simple task. If the problem is complicated, so will be the solutions. Schools must engage in a rather complex process of matching appropriate dropout prevention services and programs to targeted student groups. It is crucial, on the one hand, that the process used to solve these complex problems is systematic and organized. On the other hand, the process must be flexible enough to accommodate the wide variety of individual human needs found within groups of students who are at risk.

If the framework for intervention is built upon the following assumptions, this process can be sensitive to individual needs while providing a systematic overall approach.

1. As at risk students progress from early childhood

through high-school, the impact of negative interactions between the student and school accumulate and the number of situational factors that can lead to dropping out increase. The accumulation of negative experiences and the increased number of situational factors that the school may have to deal with as the student gets older make it increasingly difficult to program for the at risk student. Intervention early in a child's schooling therefore is extremely important.

2. It is important to implement programs and services which take into account the student's developmental level as well as the factors themselves. Almost any of the characteristics associated with dropouts can be present at any time, but may have different causes associated with the individual's developmental level. Many "risk factors" identified for students in the early grades will require a different approach than those same "risk factors" present for students in the higher grades.
3. No one program can offer alternatives for every situation. All pupils at risk will not benefit from the same program. Although we know the general characteristics of students who drop out, it is clear that dropouts are not a singular group. A school should have available a number of program options, and students should have access to a variety of programs or program components appropriate to their individual needs.
4. It is necessary to target programs and services to groups identified by common at risk characteristics, but schools must have the flexibility to take a holistic approach in providing services to the individual. Groups

targeted should include not simply currently enrolled high risk students, but out-of-school youth as well.

5. Schools need to assess their own operational structure in order to eliminate factors which contribute to students dropping out.
6. Resources of local school districts and the State must be distributed in a manner that assures that schools with large numbers of at risk students will have resources which are at least equivalent to those schools with fewer at risk students.
7. An improvement in completion rates will occur primarily as a result of initiative at the local level which in turn demands initiative and responsibility on the part of the student.

Comprehensive School Improvement Planning and Effective School Characteristics

Dropout prevention program development is a natural and integral component of comprehensive school improvement planning. During school improvement planning, a school marshalls all its fiscal resources, involves all personnel and addresses many of the same risk factors, programs and services that are related to dropout prevention.

Effective planning and implementation of school improvement ultimately involve school adoption of those characteristics of effective schools identified by current research. An effective school exhibits: (1) a positive school climate, (2) the existence of a collaborative planning process, (3) clear academic goals, (4) clearly defined curricula, (5) monitoring of student progress, (6) an ongoing concern for improving the effectiveness of teachers and staff, (7) administrative leadership, (8) parent and community involvement, (9) opportunities for student responsibility and participation, (10) rewards and incentives for student achievement, and (11) order and discipline.

While these characteristics of effective schools relate to the total academic program, they can leave a major impact on increasing completions. The following gives illustrative examples of the application of these characteristics to dropout prevention programs.

- Order and Discipline: Rules for appropriate classroom and school behavior should be brief but explicit and should be enforced fairly and firmly. The rules should also be sensitive to the cultural background of the students. An effective and fair discipline system will result in a more productive and positive learning environment in which both teachers and students have the opportunity to work on improving student performance outcomes.
- Parent and Community Involvement: Studies about student achievement indicate that strong parental and community involvement improves student performance, in conjunction with other variables. Parents and other community members can reduce the sense of alienation of the potential dropout by reinforcing their bond with school, by encouraging student identification with their heritage and relating the importance of school to family and community improvement. Parents can also contribute to increased student performance by emphasizing academic work at home, especially reading, writing, and computational ability. Community people can also provide positive reinforcement in this regard, particularly with younger students. Use of community locations for school enrichment activity is especially rewarding, as is the integration of community people in traditional school activities, such as teaching, tutoring, and guidance counseling.
- Opportunities for Student Responsibility and

Participation: Dropouts are traditionally not involved in school activities; efforts made to involve at risk students in co-curricular and extra-curricular activities enhance the probability that they will feel part of the school.

- Rewards and Incentives: Students in dropout prevention programs have known a history of lack of success and/or mediocrity during their school careers. They respond particularly well to praise and to incentives, tangible and intangible.
- Administrative Leadership: The quality of school leadership is a primary factor related to student achievement in schools. When principals exhibit strong leadership and active interest in increasing high school completion rates, the effect can be positive, especially when this leads to greater involvement of the entire school staff and to the belief that all students can master the curriculum.

Delivery of Services to Students

The school has the task of providing educational programs and services which will lead to school completion. For some students this will require very early intervention in response to academic problems or problems experienced by the student in adjusting to the school environment. Resolution of these problems will enhance the likelihood that the student will succeed in school and will be less affected by the variety of other factors that can eventually culminate in the student leaving school.

The material that follows is divided into two parts. In the first part a methodology is provided for the development of strategies that will lead to school completions by students who are at risk. In the second part, descriptions are provided of

the kind of interventions that may be appropriate for students at different grade levels.

In order to identify common and unique factors that need to be addressed in dropout prevention strategies, it is first necessary to carry out an assessment of the at risk population in terms of those factors known to be associated with dropout behavior and for which programming is required.

The methodology for dropout prevention programming presented in this section is based on research findings and professional observations which have shown that there are a variety of factors associated with drop-out behavior which help to define the at risk student. Although there are frequently some common factors present, there are also other factors that vary from individual to individual. Because no one set of factors may be present among all dropouts, programming must account for both common factors and unique factors.

The assessment to be undertaken must include the range of factors that may place a student at risk at a particular point in the student's schooling. In general, the assessment will take in more and more factors as students get older. Once at risk students are assessed, it will be possible for a school to determine the frequency with which particular at risk factors are found within the at risk population of the school.

In addition to this assessment of students, a school will need to determine what factors related to school policies and staff interactions with students may contribute to students being at risk. Such an analysis might include: a review of whether school suspension policies are effective, an examination of the extent to which staff members are knowledgeable about the life situations and culture of the students, a review of attendance policies to determine their effectiveness, and an examination of staff attitudes about at risk students. This analysis could be accomplished through the comprehensive school improvement planning process.

The assessment of these students and the assessment of the

school leads to the identification of the factors that will need to be dealt with in programming for them. It will also lead to distributing students into groups with common needs. Once this is done, school staff can proceed to the development of programs and services for the various groups of at risk students. The factors present within the group serve as a guide to the kind of programming that is needed. Group programming will also need to be supplemented by programming that responds to critical individual needs found among members of the group. Counseling with the individual to provide direct assistance or referral to other agencies is frequently a way to accommodate these individual needs.

Use of the following program elements and the development of answers to the questions embedded in the elements can provide a framework for carrying out a school and student assessment and for developing an appropriate program for at risk students.

1. **IDENTIFICATION / ASSESSMENT:** Based upon the assumption that at risk students have been initially identified by symptomatic behaviors associated with academic and attitudinal characteristics taken in context with socioeconomic, cultural and other environmental factors, what assessment activities can be used to uncover the causes which underlie those behaviors?
2. **SERVICES / PROGRAMS:** Given the risk factors of schools and students and their underlying causes, what programs and services can best be employed to reduce the negative impact these underlying causes have upon the student in the school environment?
3. **INSTRUCTION:** What is the best manner to deliver these programs and services (i.e., individualized learning, mastery learning, remedial instruction, alternative schools, etc.)?
4. **RESOURCES / SUPPORT SERVICES:** What services and resources within the school setting can be

reconfigured to support the students in dropout prevention programs?

5. **PARENT SUPPORT / INVOLVEMENT:** How can a school support parents in their role as parents, and how can a school effectively involve parents in the education of their children? How can a school engage in a partnership with the community to improve the quality of life for all residents of the community?
6. **OUTSIDE AGENCIES:** What is the necessary involvement of other agencies or personnel in the delivery of these services? How can a school interact with other agencies to ensure the provision of necessary services?

Possible Interventions for Students at Various Grade Levels

The material that follows provides narrative descriptions of the kind of programming that might be provided to at risk students at Pre-K - grade 3, grades 4 - 6, grades 7 - 8 and grades 9 - 12. Each section first describes the important characteristics for pupils at a particular grade level.

Grades Pre-K-3

General Characteristics. Prior to entering school and during the early years of schooling, sizable numbers of students exhibit signs which begin to place them at risk of eventually not completing school. Although the risk factors for students in grades Pre-K-3 are not as extensive as those factors for students in later grades, they certainly are significant and warrant attention. Factors such as limited English proficiency, single parent household, child abuse/neglect, mobility, and negative attitudes may be present in this age group and, if not effectively addressed, may ultimately lead to school dropouts. Program development in this age group may reduce the likelihood of other risk factors from developing at a later grade level.

The early years of a child's development are the root years from which future growth will stem. This is as true of intellectual, social, cultural, and emotional growth as it is of physical development. Young children learn through activity. They are busy developing muscular coordination. They learn best through their senses: touching, tasting, smelling, seeing, and hearing. At this age, they are concerned mainly with the concrete but are working to develop language facility which will make it possible for them to deal with abstract ideas later. They are working at the use of language as communication. They are trying hard to understand the world about them--most of them in the simplest terms. As they grow and learn, they are developing self-concepts which will influence future growth. They need the stimulation of varied activities and materials and the opportunity for success in appropriate experiences with things, people, and relationships. They need the support of individual guidance by an understanding adult who is sensitive to and supportive of their cultural background and different learning methods.

Possible Interventions. Current research supports the notion that early childhood programs that are developmentally-based, culturally relevant with participation from parents and involvement of the necessary community resources will have a long-term positive impact on student retention in school. Intervention early in a child's learning is crucial and should be supported according to research evidence.

Such programs build upon children's strengths and interests, not on their deficits or a prescribed curriculum; they identify a child's cultural background and learning method and capitalize on it; and they create within the young learner the disposition to go on learning by engaging children in interactive activities where they can discover through language, play and curiosity the world about them and develop social competencies needed for future success. Parental involvement is a key component of a developmental education program. Schools should focus on

providing meaningful parent involvement where parents understand the different learning methods of young children and can act as partners in the developmental approach to their children's education.

All children should undergo comprehensive screening to help identify problems or potential problems as soon as they enter the educational system. The screening should focus on the identification of possible academic, health (medical, dental, and psychological) and behavioral problems. Schools should work closely with relevant social service agencies to ensure that students and families are provided with the necessary services related to their needs. The results of a student's comprehensive screening should be readily available to a student's teacher as the child progresses through school to assist teachers in meeting the student's needs and building upon the student's strengths. The results of a comprehensive screening should also be used to involve the student's parents as critical partners in the educational development of their children.

Those schools with significant numbers of Pre-K -3 students who are limited in English proficiency, are from single parent households, or who are economically disadvantaged, should strive to provide small classes. Teachers should be provided with relevant pre-service and staff development programs which focus on the developmental approach to education and assist teachers in recognizing the early warning signs of potential dropouts so that appropriate intervention strategies can be implemented as soon as possible.

Grades 4-6

General Characteristics. The egocentrism which characterizes the student in grades Pre-K through 3 is gradually replaced by a growing need for group membership. The strong desire for group affiliation often inhibits their freedom to express original ideas. Students begin to seek ways to attain group status which can be either positive or negative in nature.

The values of the group assume increased importance and the beginnings of peer influences are evident. During these grades, students are eager to establish some independence from adults, but still want the reassurance that a supportive, caring adult is nearby. Discipline is increasingly a problem, especially for those who are entering early adolescence.

At these grade levels, students continue to be assigned to one teacher primarily responsible for their total educational program. Students have grown accustomed to school procedure and feel "in control" of their environment and what is happening to them. Greater flexibility in the scheduling of time allows them to experience growing independence in the completion of their school work. Teacher expectations concerning what students should be able to do at these grade levels are consequently much greater, which may prove a significant source of frustration for some students.

The identification of at risk students continues to focus upon low academic achievement, poor self esteem and a variety of behavioral problems. Poor interpersonal relationships with teachers and peers begin to show up during these years. Students who have been retained at some point and are over-age for their class may become an increasing problem.

Possible Interventions. A systematic process of identification and assessment should be developed in the school. Teacher observations and experiences must be recognized as a vital assessment tool. Family characteristics including cultural background should be considered in the assessment. The child study team approach can be used effectively for these grade levels. Attendance improvement through home contact programs, using truant officers, attendance teachers, and computer calls can be considered, provided that these are sensitive to the child's circumstances.

The school should adopt discipline policies which incorporate increased counseling services. Flexible extracurricular eligibility policies which do not deny student

access by using solely academic success criteria should be considered. Academic enrichment, remediation, and tutoring programs that are student-centered, involve trained, committed staff who are knowledgeable about student's cultural background and learning methods, include low teacher/student ratios, and use relevant curricula coordinated with the regular classroom programs are instructional approaches which seem most appropriate for this population. English as a second language and bilingual education may also play a part in instructional design.

As the school seeks to make connections between the needs of at risk students and school resources and programs, there will be many instances when the school will need to reach out into the community to supplement school efforts. Each locality has a range of community services available for inclusion in dropout prevention programs. Schools should seek information about what is available and establish referral and cooperative service practices. A school may consider identifying a school/community liaison person for this purpose.

Grades 7-8

General Characteristics. Students enter the developmental stage of early adolescence during these grades. This is a critical period which is accompanied by high levels of stress. These students are no longer children, but are not yet adults. The transition that these students are making is complicated by significant physical, psychological and emotional changes. It is during this period that students begin to adopt self-damaging behavior patterns such as poor health practices, use of tobacco, alcohol and other harmful substances. Delinquency, alienation from school, unprotected and early sexual activity, and aggressive behavior begin to manifest themselves.

The school environment itself also presents a transition for these students. They will be moving from an elementary school setting to a secondary school setting. In most cases, this will mean a change of buildings. These students will have to adjust

to a variety of variables which could include larger school populations, departmentalized instruction, differing expectations of a variety of teachers, and new sets of rules, regulations and procedures.

Within this context, many of the factors which help to identify at risk students during grades K-6 are still applicable. However, students who were not identified as being at risk during their elementary school years could begin to exhibit undesirable behaviors or performance. Academic achievement levels may begin to decline and students may start to exhibit, with greater frequency, problems associated with school discipline, attendance, poor interpersonal skills and negative attitudes toward school. Peer influences become stronger and can result in drug abuse, alcohol abuse, pregnancy and delinquency, all of which can interfere with the ability of students to benefit from the educational experience.

Possible Interventions. While there is little formal research concerning the efficiency of intervention at the junior high school level more and more practitioners are convinced that effective dropout prevention strategies at this age group will help at risk students to successfully complete their senior high school years. A systematic process of compiling information on students is no less important than during other junctures in a student's career. Information pertaining to earlier school years should not be overlooked. Alternative education programs for junior high school students can focus on career education, work-study, basic academic skills, and employability. State syllabi for health are drug education, physical education, and home and career skills should be reviewed in planning appropriate instruction. Integrative language development and the identification of student cultural and learning methods also should be considered. Peer involvement in support groups, tutoring, and school activities are important for this age group.

Staff development programs should address teacher sensitivity to at risk students with different cultural

background, classroom management, classroom-based assessment, and available community-based services and resources. District policies regarding discipline, grading, attendance, withdrawal, and suspension should be reviewed and revised accordingly. The cultural differences of students should be considered as discipline policies are developed. Guidance and counseling services by school counselors, school psychologists, and school social workers are resources which should not be overlooked.

These school based resources can in many instances be supplemented by active parental involvement as well as community based services and resources.

Workshops for parents, conducting home visits, and the creation of parent support groups will involve parents and gain crucial support of the school. Each locality has a range of community services available for inclusion in dropout prevention programs. Schools must become more aware of what is available and establish referral and cooperative service practices. It would be advisable to identify a school/community liaison for this purpose.

Grades 9-12

General Characteristics. As a student gets older there are a greater number of factors which may interact with one another to make it likely that a student will drop out. Some of the factors at this age are the same as those found at earlier ages: lack of academic success, being old for the grade, feeling alienated, not having support for education from the home and not having English language skills. In addition to these, however, other factors come into play such as the need to contribute to the support of the family, being an abuser of drugs and/or alcohol, being pregnant or having a young child, and having a desire to be employed. As a consequence, the range of factors for which a school may have to design its program is broadened and even more services may be needed at this age.

Interventions for In-School Youth at Grades 9-12. Two

examples may serve to illustrate the kind of programming that may be needed once student assessment identifies the factors that need to be addressed. The first example is a group of Hispanic students with inadequate native language skills, poor English skills, a history of school failure, lacking job skills, in need of funds to contribute to family support, and feeling significantly alienated from the regular secondary school environment and lacking in parental support for education. It is likely that the following programming would be of benefit:

Since this group of students feels alienated from the regular school setting, students would receive a bilingual program in an alternative setting. Curriculum components would include basic skills, bilingual instruction with study of the Hispanic culture being especially important, work study to supply needed income and occupational education. Instruction would incorporate techniques designed to reduce alienation such as small group instruction and regular counseling to deal with personal as well as academic problems.

The second example is a school having a group of pregnant students and students who have children. It may be desirable to deliver that program in a setting where these students have the opportunity to observe and work with young children. Curriculum for these students would include issues related to maintaining health during pregnancy, parenting, how to access social services and other community agencies, family planning, vocational planning, and occupational education. Counselors would work with the students to help them deal with the variety of problems faced by teenage students who are pregnant or have children. Community-based agencies and social service agencies would work in conjunction with the school to provide the kind of assistance that will make it possible for these students to remain in school.

Interventions for Out-of-School Youth at Grades 9-12 (Age 16-21)

Although preventive measures for students in grades pre-K

through 12 may eventually have a significant impact on high school completion rates, such measures represent a long-term solution. Short-term measures are also required for the large numbers of young people who are outside of the school system. A number of special provisions for out-of-school youth are proposed in the following paragraphs.

Students might be provided a "leave of absence" for up to one academic year during the 10-12 sequence. The leave would be secure if the students registered their intention to leave school within thirty days of doing so or if they applied and were accepted. The "leave" would permit the student to return to school at pre-determined periods of the school year and during the summer. Availability of the "leave of absence" would be widely advertised and parents would be notified at the beginning of each school year in a language they understand. Exit interviews and follow-up by the schools would also be required.

Each school, particularly those with high rates of noncompletion, would be required to develop re-entry provisions for students on leave of absence. Such provisions would include a program of instruction for returning students that would begin on the semester, in summer school, or at the beginning of a new unit of study. Students would also have the right to return to their home school even if their residence changed.

All returning students would be required to take a carefully designed assessment battery and, where desireable, participate in an appropriate program of instruction that corresponds to an individual educational plan (IEP) for 10-15 weeks. At the conclusion of the transition program reentry, students would be placed into a regular program of study. The content of the transitional preparation program would usually concentrate on intensive instruction in reading, writing and mathematics, but other transition courses must be available based upon student need. Credit through examination should be encouraged. Support services and a relationship with a "rearing" adult must also be available. Each school, with high rates of noncompletion, would

be required to hire an ombudsperson to resolve any problems.

Every school district would be required to eliminate out-of-school-suspension without placement. Each student suspension would be required to have placement associated with the suspension and report to designated officials. The placement might correspond to the reasons for suspension. Placements would include: community service, therapeutic counseling (individual or family), work assignment, religious service, programs of institutional observation/participation and optional schools. A comprehensive document of quality optional programs and placements must be advertised and provided to students and parents.

Each school should prepare a roster of internships, community service, and employment opportunities that might be available to students on leaves of absence. The school would be required to link students with developmental activities outside the school setting.

State and local attendance laws should be modified to acknowledge community service, internships, work experience, parenting or family development as life experience and worthy of credit toward completion of a high school diploma. Credit by examination would be encouraged.

In addition, employers would be required to certify that school-aged students are on leaves of absence or officially withdrawn from school before employing the student in any capacity. Tax incentives would be provided to employers for their participation in this effort.

Each identified district would be required to create and maintain optional programs that lead to completion of a high school diploma. These would include but not be limited to: school within school (mini-school); GED program; and occupation-specific programs of instruction. Optional programs are to be available to those students for whom re-entry into a regular program is deemed inappropriate. These programs might be offered directly by the schools or through colleges and other educational institutions.

INCREASING HIGH SCHOOL COMPLETIONS
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the most important actions to be taken in grades PreK-3 to help increase high school completion rates?

   Local:

   State:

2. What are the most important actions to be taken in grades 4-6 to help increase high school completion rates?

   Local:

   State:

3. What are the most important actions to be taken in grades 7-8 to help increase high school completion rates?

   Local:

   State:

4. What are the most important actions to be taken in grades 9-12 to help increase high school completion rates?

   Local:

   State:

5. What are the most important actions to be taken for out-of-school youth, ages 16-21, to help increase high school completion rates?

   Local:

   State:

6. What are the most important actions to be taken by colleges and universities, other educational institutions, and other elements of society to help increase high school completion?

   Local:

   State:

7. What are the most important areas of research that universities can undertake in relation to the factors that reduce high school completion? That help increase high school completion?

   Local:

   State: